

Testimony of **Jonathan Perloe**, a resident of Cos Cob opposing reduction in Project Longevity Budget of the Office of Policy and Management in Governor's Bill 7027, Section 1, Line T94.

Chairs Osten, Formica and Walker and other esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony this evening after what I know have been some very long days. My name is Jonathan Perloe. I live in Cos Cob and have been a resident there for 22 years. I now work for CT Against Gun Violence as its director of Programs and Communications. However, I am testifying as a private citizen.

I am requesting that the Appropriations Committee does not reduce the FY 2018 requested funding for Project Longevity (line T94) by 38 percent or \$335,000 as recommended in the Governor's budget bill 7027, which comes on top of a 6 percent reduction in fiscal 2017 estimated spending versus 2016.

I fully appreciate that the state is under severe budget constraints, and recognize that both the Governor and your Committee have to make very difficult tradeoffs that are very likely to adversely affect one constituency or another. But I am asking you to not make this drastic cut to Project Longevity's budget. The \$335,000 cut is hugely consequential to this life-saving gun violence prevention program, yet only represents a tiny fraction of the total OPM budget of \$188 million, less than 0.2 percent of the total.

Project Longevity is a focused deterrence program that has a proven track record in reducing gun violence in our three largest cities. You have heard other testimony tonight attesting to its success in saving lives. You have also heard testimony that beyond the immeasurable value of lives saved, the direct costs of gun homicides likely outweigh the costs of preventing them through Project Longevity. Many of these costs are borne by taxpayers: emergency services, police investigations, medical treatment, legal proceedings and incarceration. So it would be "penny-wise, pound foolish" to cut funding for Project Longevity.

But I would like to talk about the matter of equity, and my impression of what the state's budgeting priorities says about what matters.

I got involved in the gun violence prevention movement, like so many of us in Connecticut, following the horrible tragedy in Newtown. It drew me in because of the enormous human cost of gun violence in our country, and the obvious solutions for lowering the toll. In fact, it is so important to me that I left my 30-year career in marketing communications to join CAGV in a staff position beginning last month.

The CT legislature and Governor Malloy deserve huge credit for quickly strengthening our gun laws in response to Newtown, making them the second strongest in the nation.

What I quickly learned after getting involved in gun violence prevention is that for all the attention given to horrific mass shootings like those at Sandy Hook, they account for a fraction of gun homicides. In 2015, 475 people were killed in mass shootings, less than 4 percent of total gun homicides in the U.S. In Connecticut, thankfully, there have been no victims of mass shootings since 2012. Like elsewhere in the country, the majority of gun homicides in Connecticut happen in our largest cities, and disproportionately the victims are young men of color. Yet those deaths, and the pain they cause to family and friends, don't make the front page. Worse, they do not appear to get the spending priority that mass shootings attract, including here in Connecticut.

I did some research and learned from an article in the Hartford Courant that in the two years after the Sandy Hook school shooting the town of Newtown and other agencies received more than \$17 million in federal aid. And I learned that from the New York Times that the state awarded Newtown \$50 million to rebuild the Sandy Hook Elementary School. I am not suggesting this money was not deserved. The people of Newtown, some whom I know well, have been scarred in the worst of ways. Nor am I suggesting that Connecticut does not invest in the health and safety of its urban residents.

However, from my outsider view, it makes me wonder if we are valuing all of our citizens equally when we can spend \$50 million to rebuild a school—a direct outcome of gun violence, but we can't find \$335,000 to fund a program that is proven to save lives—and likely saves multiples of the cost over time.

Through hard on-the-ground work by the incredibly committed staff of Project Longevity, community partners and law enforcement, we have seen a dramatic decrease in gun homicides in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven, as you heard in previous testimony. Independent studies prove that the “cure violence” strategy used by Project Longevity saves lives. Please show that these urban lives matter by restoring funding to the requested amount of \$885,000.

Thank you for your time and consideration.